USAID/Caucasus/Georgia

Civil Society Assessment
(Including NGO Development, Media & Political Process)

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David Black (G/DG)
Susan Jay (G/DG)
Michael Keshishian (E&E/DG)

With editorial assistance from
Stevens Tucker, ARD

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Task Order CTO, Catherine Johnson

Submitted by:

ARD, Inc.
159 Bank Street, Third Floor
Burlington, Vermont 05401
telephone: (802) 658-3890
fax: (802) 658-4247
e-mail: ard@ardinc.com

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CTO for the basic contract:
Joshua Kaufman
Center for Democracy and Governance, G/DG
Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support, and Research
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-3100

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

- The Team recommends that civil society work should not be phased out by the year 2002 as suggested in the Mission's Strategy. Civil society in Georgia is underdeveloped and sustained assistance is warranted in this area for the duration of the current strategy and beyond.
- USAID/Georgia's civil society strategy should focus on encouraging citizens, media, and NGOs/CSOs to demand greater transparency and accountability of state and non-state institutions within the framework of the rule of law, with the aim of sustaining democratic reforms.

Civil Society Organizations

- Future assistance in the area of civil society development should be provided more narrowly and strategically than has been the case in the past. Specifically, future assistance should focus on NGOs/CSOs whose mandates involve advocacy, articulating citizen demands for greater transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in governance at both national and local levels. Such an approach need not imply a bias in favor of larger or Tbilisi-based organizations.
- Consistent with this focusing of assistance, the Team recommends that larger grants be made to a smaller number of NGOs whose focus is making local and national government more transparent and accountable. Larger grants would allow NGOs to develop longer-term strategies and greater expertise.

Media

- Media strengthening is central to achieving USAID/Caucasus goals and objectives consistent with the Mission's country strategy shift to "increased attention on impact at the local and individual level." Assistance to strengthen independent media should continue throughout the present strategic cycle and perhaps beyond, to consolidate gains made by independent media, address remaining weaknesses in the sector, contribute to the achievement of various USAID/Georgia goals and objectives, and help prevent a possible backlash against freedom of speech.
- The present emphasis on assisting independent local TV stations is warranted, as is continued work with print media. Within media assistance programs, more emphasis should be placed on legal rights and advocacy, including lobbying for improved enabling legislation, as well as defending and upholding press freedoms and media rights. Although many local independent media outlets already work closely with NGOs/CSOs and cover local government issues, much more could be done to strengthen links with other DG sectors and objectives.

Political Parties

- Limited political will seems to exist within the parties to overcome their many institutional weaknesses, particularly among the national leadership who hold most of the authority within the party. Hence, while the need for improvement within Georgia's parties is great, the Team recommends that following the completion of its existing pre-elections party activities, USAID should consider a reorientation of party assistance to concentrate where possible on grassroots party structures with a focus on youth activists. Over time, improvements in local government legislation and in the electoral process may lead political parties to address their internal weakness.

Elections

- Knowledgeable observers have suggested that the central issue determining the quality of elections is not a lack of skills, but rather a willingness on the part of well-placed officials to perpetrate electoral fraud. It is the assessment of this Team that if the present deficit in political will persists beyond the forthcoming local elections, USAID should seriously consider discontinuing its support to the CEC.
- The greatest need with regard to the electoral process is to strengthen the independence of election administration, to increase the checks within the system to limit the incidence of fraud, and to pursue redress in the case of clear violations. Therefore, the Team recommends that USAID support Georgians actively seeking to create political pressure on the government and the parliament to improve both the legislation governing elections administration and the effective implementation of that administration. Depending on political developments, that may mean activities financing only civic advocacy or, should the government or parties demonstrate through action greater interest in electoral reform, support to those institutions.
- To strengthen the case for the need for electoral reform, USAID should support a robust domestic observation effort, including media monitoring. Documenting, in detail, the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral process can provide advocates for reform powerful data to better refine their priorities for change and to more dramatically press their case. Since domestic election observation efforts tend to generate broad-scale popular interest, such an approach may also serve to widen the membership base of partner NGOs, in itself a beneficial outcome.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. General Conclusions

The main conclusion of the team is that civil society and media activities should not be phased out by 2002 as suggested by the Mission's 2000-2003 Strategic Plan. Support for civil society organizations (CSOs) and independent media should remain a central programmatic focus for the remainder of the current strategy period and beyond. At the same time, the existing political party and electoral assistance programs should be reviewed and refocused in line with the general thrust of the analysis that follows. The recommendations below would warrant creating a new SO 2.1 for the Mission Performance Plan, but if this is deemed undesirable, they could also be captured through slight modifications to the existing IRs under SOs 2.2 and 2.3, while maintaining the existing strategy.

In addition to the specific program recommendations included in the sections that follow, one general theme emerged during the assessment that merits special emphasis. *USAID/Georgia's civil society strategy should focus on encouraging citizens, media, and CSOs to demand greater transparency and accountability of state and non-state institutions within the framework of the rule of law.* More than simply providing grants to advocacy CSOs, the civil society strategy should integrate support for civic organizations, independent media, professional associations, businesses, rights groups, watchdog organizations, legal service and information providers, and politically active citizens with the aim of sustaining economic and democratic reforms through demands for greater transparency and accountability.

The development of a vibrant civil society is essential for sustained economic and democratic reform in Georgia. In the absence of a civil society, market economies easily give way to distortions of official or corporate corruption. As in most NIS countries, political-economic interest groups are reluctant to support reforms that threaten their financial gains, or worse, expose the illegal or unethical means by which these gains are made. Without credible oversight mechanisms or consistent respect for the rule of law, elites are greatly enriched as the overall standard of living stagnates or declines. Indeed, the government and official institutions will continue to initiate and sustain reforms, and international organizations, foreign governments, and foreign investors will also play an important role. But Georgian civil society will increasingly be the main impetus for reform. Without it, the political-economic interest groups that have the most to gain from the *status quo* (limited transparency, accountability, and competition) will almost certainly continue to resist or block further significant reforms.

The problem, however, is that most citizens are not aware of their rights, do not know how to take advantage of their rights, cannot afford to protest when their rights have been violated, have no recourse when legal decisions are not enforced, do not believe that laws are applied impartially, are apathetic about official corruption, and believe that it is almost impossible to do anything if the government infringes upon their rights. The civil society strategy should, therefore, include activities that address these problems.

At least three other themes cut across all of the individual sections of this report. First, it should be noted that civil society development in Georgia will be a long-term endeavor requiring sustained support for civic institutions well beyond 2002. As in many countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the economic situation and legal framework are not yet developed to the point where civil society, whether it be CSOs, independent media, or grass-roots political movements, can rely on financial contributions of ordinary citizens to be sustainable or legally and transparently engage in significant revenue-generating activities.

Second, the role of donor organizations and Western governments should not be underestimated as an important element of supporting the ability of civil society to demand greater transparency, accountability, and reform. Not only is donor funding vital to the survival of even the most mature

CSOs, but the team often heard declarations that the moral support and engagement of donors and Western governments is extremely helpful to CSOs, independent media, and political reformers.

Third, adoption of a new Local Government law devolving significant responsibility, fiscal authority, and political accountability to the local level would significantly increase the prospects for achievement in all of the civil society arenas.

B. Civil Society Organizations

The Team recommends that civil society work should not be phased out by the year 2002 as suggested in the Mission's Strategy. Civil society in Georgia is underdeveloped and sustained assistance is warranted in this area. The development of civil society organizations (CSOs) continues to be a key component to achieving the USAID/Caucasus goal of facilitating the creation of a more prosperous and peaceful region based on democratic principles, market economies, and civic participation at all levels in Georgia. More specifically, the continued development of CSOs should contribute directly to the MPP goals of democracy and human rights.

However, the Team does recommend that future assistance in the area of civil society development be provided more narrowly and strategically than has been the case in the past. Specifically, future assistance should focus on working with CSOs in making local and national government more transparent and accountable. While the development of civil society across the board is important for the medium and long-term development of Georgia, this focus is justified because corruption and a lack of rule of law threaten to undermine reforms in the short-term and retards the development of civil society by creating widespread apathy. Targeting assistance, under SO 2.2 and 2.3, to CSOs that specifically address issues of government transparency and accountability should help create an environment more conducive to the broader development of civil society.

While the Mission will continue to work with CSOs through SOs 1.3 and 3.1, the Team does not believe that the particular approach that these SOs will take will adequately address key elements of civil society development. NGO assistance under SO 1.3 will focus on commercial law, while SO 3.1 will work with NGOs mainly in the area of community mobilization.

C. Media

Media strengthening is key to achieving USAID/Caucasus goals and objectives consistent with the Mission's country strategy shift to "increased attention on impact at the local and individual level." Independent media is a leading source of information that citizens need in order to begin to participate in and benefit from democratic and market reforms. Furthermore, independent media is beginning to play an important watchdog role and fostering greater government transparency and accountability. Media strengthening assistance is timely, given the rather good enabling environment for press freedom and financial profitability. Of all the 12 NIS former Soviet republics, Georgia has perhaps the best environment for the free flow of information; some independent media outlets are already profitable; and an independent TV network providing viable alternatives to state-sponsored news programs is profitable, popular, and reaches about two-thirds of the population.

Despite the relatively favorable enabling environment for press freedom and the noteworthy successes of independent media in Georgia thus far, however, it is too early for the Mission to begin to phase out media strengthening activities. Independent media continue to be pressured by government at all levels; self-censorship is common; threats and violence against journalists occurs; the level of professionalism and ethics is very low; investigative journalism is not widely practiced; and most media, especially at the local level, lack the knowledge and means to become self-sustaining. Furthermore, consolidating gains now will not only serve to support most other Mission objectives that rely on increased transparency and free flow of information, but will also make it more difficult for a regression of press freedoms as has occurred in most other former Soviet republics.

Assistance to strengthen independent media should continue beyond 2002, at or near current funding levels, to consolidate gains made by independent media, address remaining weaknesses in the sector, contribute to the achievement of various USAID/Georgia goals and objectives, and help prevent a possible backlash against freedom of speech as has occurred in many other former Soviet republics.

Emphasis should continue to be placed on assisting independent local TV stations that are increasingly effective at providing citizens with local news that informs as well as positively influences local governance and rule of law. More emphasis should also be placed on legal rights and advocacy, including lobbying for improved enabling legislation as well as defending and upholding press freedoms and media rights. Although many local independent media outlets already work closely with CSOs and cover local government issues, much more could be done to strengthen links with other DG sectors and objectives.

D. Political Processes

While the strongest voices for democratization and greater governmental accountability are coming from civic organizations and through independent media, Georgia's political parties have not emerged as leading advocates for reform. On the whole, it appears only limited interest exists within the major political parties to transform themselves into well-structured democratic organizations presenting the public with credible, differentiated policy platforms. To the extent reformers within parties exist, they tend to be younger Georgians, rather than those in key leadership positions. To date, leaders have taken few concrete actions that can be viewed as meaningful first steps towards building effective, modern democratic parties with specific strategies for increasing the accountability of government institutions. Few analysts expected this lack of leadership for the "democratization agenda" to change in the near-term.

Georgia's political parties are neither providing clear leadership for how to strengthen democracy and good governance, nor addressing the organizational weaknesses that inhibit their electoral competitiveness and their ability to act as a legitimate means for aggregating citizen interests. Across the political spectrum, parties generally lack internal democracy and meaningful distribution of power within the party. Little effort is made to develop meaningful party platforms with messages tied to specific policy agendas, distinct from those of other parties. Little attention is paid to membership development and addressing the under-representation of women within party membership and leadership. Constituency relations are weak, and two-way communication within organizational structures is limited. Moreover, parties have generally failed to separate elected party representatives from responsibilities related to party management. While financing for parties falls short of organizational needs, the legal and political environment is sufficiently open that parties do have the space necessary to operate and begin to develop themselves institutionally.

Based on the research of this team, interviewees provided little evidence that USAID and its NGO partners can develop a political party program that will change, in the near-term, how political parties operate and effectively advocate for and seek to provide more transparent and accountable governance. As noted above, limited political will seems to exist within the parties to overcome their many institutional weaknesses, particularly among the national leadership who hold most of the authority within the party. Hence, while the need for improvement within Georgia's parties is great, the team recommends that following the completion of its existing pre-elections party activities, USAID should consider a re-orientation of party assistance to concentrate where possible on grassroots party structures with a focus on youth activists.

E. Electoral Processes

The ability of citizens to hold leaders accountable is perhaps most directly exercised through the electoral process. However, in Georgia, that process has proved increasingly flawed. To achieve the USAID's overarching goal of improving standards of living and increasing governmental transparency and accountability, the team recommends continued efforts to improve the electoral

process. To a large extent, the issue is not a lack of technical capacity for election administration. The 1998 local elections demonstrated that a competent cadre exists who can run sound elections, even when wages are low and erratically paid. Rather, the quality of the electoral process is undermined by the willingness of the government officials who support CUG or Revival to use their positions of power to influence electoral outcomes. Election observers have documented serious irregularities, including a weak voter registration process, flawed voter rolls, instances of ballot stuffing, media bias, and lack of transparency in vote counting and tabulation.

The Georgian Central Election Commission has broad authority over the administration of elections. Ideally, the Commission would use its authority to address pressing problems. It would, *inter alia*, provide the leadership necessary to ensure more competitive and fair elections, ensure that the voter registry is posted 10 days before the election (as is required by law), issue procedures for how citizens can ask for names to be removed from lists, and institute measures to increase ballot-box and tabulation list security. Thus far it has failed to do so, although many easy solutions are available. The IFES country director has sought for several months to obtain records of Commission meetings to no avail. She surmised that the lack of transparency was likely related either to the absence of records or to the trivial nature of these meetings.

Were the CEC to attempt to take action, it is unclear that it could enforce respect for its regulations among local election administrators, the police, and other government officials. Many observers suggest that current local election officials and other government actors are the heart of the problem, instigating many of the electoral violations. Broad concerns regarding political bias are reinforced by the comments of several qualified senior election administrators who discount commitment to fair, competent election management on the part of the CEC and other government officials. Moreover, opposition parties have failed to use their seats on the commission or other advocacy tactics to press for specific electoral reforms.

Given these conditions, the greatest need with regard to the electoral process is to strengthen the independence of election administration, to increase the checks within the system to limit the incidence of fraud, and to pursue redress in the case of clear violations. Therefore, the team recommends that USAID support Georgians actively seeking to create political pressure on the government and the parliament to improve both the legislation governing elections administration and the effective implementation of that administration. Depending on political developments, that may mean activities financing only civic advocacy, or should the government or parties demonstrate through action greater interest in electoral reform, support to those institutions. Improvements in the electoral process may then impel political parties to revisit their weakness. Absent reform, little incentive exists for parties to seriously evaluate themselves, given the belief that in the end, those in government who control the election apparatus will ensure that the incumbent wins.

To strengthen the case for the need for electoral reform, USAID should support a robust domestic observation effort, including media monitoring. Domestic monitoring efforts in Georgia have demonstrated the capacity of local organizations to launch nationwide observation missions not only for election day itself, but also thorough observation of the pre- and post-election process. Documenting, in detail, the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral process can provide advocates for reform powerful data to better refine their priorities for change and to more dramatically press their case. Since domestic election observation efforts tend to generate broad-scale popular interest, such an approach may also serve to widen the membership base of partner NGOs, in itself a beneficial outcome.

Many analysts interviewed stated that a sufficient critical mass exists who know how to do the job; the problems with the electoral process were emphatically characterized as problems of political will and a lack of independence. Knowledgeable observers have suggested that the central issue determining the quality of elections is not a lack of skills, but rather a willingness on the part of well-placed officials to perpetrate electoral fraud. It is the assessment of this team that if the present deficit

in political will persists beyond the forthcoming local elections, USAID should seriously consider discontinuing its support to the CEC.

I. INTRODUCTION

This assessment was conducted in response to a request from USAID/Caucasus to examine current activities funded under SO 2.3, "More Efficient and Responsive Local Governance," which do not specifically address local governance (i.e., activities in the areas of civil society, media, and political processes).[1] Although regional self-government initiatives under this SO include activities to promote a vibrant civil society, support a free and independent mass media, and provide assistance for political processes, these activities are not well reflected in the intermediate results. Furthermore, the current country strategy envisions a phase-out of funding for NGO and media strengthening activities.

As outlined in the SOW (see Annex 1), the principal objectives of this assessment were to (1) analyze the contribution that NGO, media, and political/electoral process activities make to USAID/Caucasus' portfolio; and (2) elaborate specific strategic and programmatic recommendations for the USAID SO 2.3 strategy.

The assessment was prepared in two phases. The initial analysis was prepared by a team fielded by USAID/Washington, consisting of Michael Keshishian (E&E/EEST), Susan Jay (G/DG), and David Black (G/DG), who each took responsibility for one substantive area. Prior to departure, team members met with Washington, DC-based representatives of several USAID DG partners working in Georgia; conferred with relevant E&E/DG staff; and reviewed relevant reports, articles, and documents, including the USAID Assistance Strategy for Georgia. The analytic team conducted interviews in Georgia during approximately two weeks in April 2001. While in Georgia, the team met with a broad cross-section of Georgians, foreign donors, and USAID/Georgia's main implementing partners ISAR/Horizonti, Internews, ICFJ, NDI, IRI, IFES, and the Eurasia Foundation. The team conducted meetings in Tbilisi and several other cities and towns selected by the USAID/Georgia DG office. Members of the team also observed some USAID-funded training programs.

Following the completion of the analytic sections, USAID/Tbilisi contracted ARD, Inc. to integrate these into a final assessment report, and to assist the D/G Strategic Objective team in reworking its strategic approach based on the recommendations flowing from the assessment. To this end, ARD Senior Associate Stevens Tucker spent three weeks in Tbilisi during May and June 2001. The report has also benefited significantly from the contributions of Manana Gegeshidze, Nino Buachidze, and Khatuna Kunchulia. Although edited and revised somewhat for the sake of consistency between sections, the substance and conclusions of the present report remain those of the initial analytic team.

This report is divided into four main sections: Civil Society, Independent Media, Political Processes, and Electoral Processes. Each section includes a sectoral analysis and recommendations for USAID strategy.

[1] This Assessment responds to USAID/Washington's directive (Cable 136903, July 1999, Washington, DC), which states, "CIVIL SOCIETY: The Mission proposed to begin closeout of civil society activities in 2002. Program Objective Team (POT) 2.1 viewed the discussions of progress in consolidating a strong civil society sector, in both the strategy and R4, as overly optimistic. While there have been improvements in building NGO capacity, the POT doubted that the job of establishing sustainable NGO and independent media sectors would be close to completion by 2002 and that further USAID support would be required. The Mission did not concur with this assessment. In addition, it argued that civil society concerns would continue to be addressed throughout association and NGO building under other strategic objectives (SOs), such as SOs 1.3, 2.3, and 3.1. However, the Mission agreed with POT 2.1 to assess the issue of sustainability for NGOs and independent media during FY 2001 to confirm whether a phase out of civil society in 2002 makes sense. The results of this assessment will be reported in the R4 submitted in 2001."

II. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

A. Analysis of Civil Society in Georgia

Other than an enlightened "intelligentsia" based mainly in Tbilisi, the level of civil society development is weak in Georgia, particularly in the regions. After about a decade of large-scale corruption, largely failed and unimplemented reforms and, most importantly, a sharp decline in the quality of life for the vast majority of Georgians, euphoria and optimism have given way to cynicism and defeatism. Recent opinion polls show that indifference, apathy, and cynicism are at an all-time high in Georgia since independence from the Soviet Union. Many of the most basic municipal services, notably water and electricity, are not being delivered reliably. "Georgians' confidence in their government has declined across the board," with the number of people who believe that Georgia is not a democracy exceeding the number of people who believe it is.[2] Lack of faith in government extends from the President all the way to S*akrebulos* (councils) at the village level. Citizens in a recent focus group analysis said that they feel forgotten by government, do not know who their local government representatives are, and do not believe that they (the officials) can accomplish anything.[3] The current situation has reportedly made the Communist Party more popular as people reminisce of days when life was easier. Not only does the public have little faith that the government can solve any of their problems, the government is often seen as the source of many problems.

B. The Georgian NGO Sector in Tbilisi and in the Regions

During the time frame discussed above, a diverse NGO sector has developed in Georgia. International observers often comment that Georgia's NGO sector is exceptional within the context of the NIS. While it is true that the NGO sector in Georgia is unique in both the numbers of registered NGOs and in the degree in which some of them have been able to push for reforms, the vast majority of Georgian NGOs are actually inactive.

Exact figures on the number of Georgian NGOs are difficult to obtain because no comprehensive registry exists. Recent estimates suggest that the number of registered NGOs now exceeds 3,000. Of that number, about 500 to 800 (between 12 and 23 percent) NGOs are or have ever been active to some extent, having received one or more grants. Of that subset, approximately 100 NGOs (less than one percent) can be classified as very active, having received more than one grant and operating more or less full-time. Finally, only about 20 to 50 NGOs in total can be considered very active *and strong* in that they have some ability to interact with government at the national level in policy formulation and decision making.

Not surprisingly and as in many other NIS countries in which USAID has activities, NGOs are much more developed, experienced, and sophisticated in the capital, Tbilisi, than they are in the regions. This is due to a number of factors. Tbilisi, being the capital of a highly centralized state, has the greatest number and concentration of educated, reform-minded people, many of whom can speak English. Tbilisi is by far the largest population center in Georgia with about one million of Georgia's 4.5 million people.[4] Even the second largest city Kutaisi has a population of only about 240,000. In general, information (such as on grant competitions) is much more readily available in Tbilisi than in the regions. To work in certain sectors (education, for example), NGOs must obtain licenses from the relevant ministry before they can operate – a process easier for Tbilisi-based NGOs than for those based in the regions.

Tbilisi-based NGOs are also more likely to have received training and technical assistance because training opportunities – as with many other factors in Georgia – are more readily available in Tbilisi

[2] "Georgians' Faith in Their Governments Wanes As Pessimism Mounts", Office of Research, Opinion Analysis, Department of State, January 30, 2001.
[3] "Focus Group Analysis of Local Democracy in Georgia", National Democratic Institute, March 2001.
[4] Officially, Georgia has a population of 5.5 million but most estimates believe it to be about 4.5 million.

than in the regions. Tbilisi-based NGOs are poised at the hub of Georgian society and tend to have better developed networks than regional NGOs. For example, the Georgian Young Lawyers Association has about 70 chapters and ISFED (established by the National Democratic Institute) has about 40 chapters in the 66 "rayons" or districts of Georgia. Accordingly, Tbilisi-based NGOs also tend to have larger memberships, while many regional NGOs have fewer than five members.

The majority of Georgian NGOs retain neither a wide constituency, significant numbers of clients, nor a large membership base. The Team learned only of two NGOs with a significant membership base: the Georgian Young Lawyers Association and ISFED. The general population possesses only a weak understanding about the nature and function of the Third Sector, especially in the regions. In some cases, the population perceives NGOs as extensions of international donors. Some view NGOs cynically, believing that many exist only to tap donor funding, echoing Thomas Carothers' suggestion that "NGO work (has) become a lifestyle for some rather than a cause."[5] Many persons interviewed in the course of this assessment felt that most NGOs are doing a poor job of public outreach or even cooperating with each other. The Team learned that some NGOs are reluctant to share information with other NGOs because of the competitive environment that many donors create in awarding grants.[6]

Given an unemployment rate of 14 percent in Georgia today (and a much higher underemployed rate), it is probably true that many people formed NGOs as a way of creating employment for themselves. Even employed persons sometimes opt for a position with an NGO as salaries with the latter tend to be much higher. The Team learned from a roundtable of NGOs in Akhaltsikhe that a local government official resigned from his position to work for an NGO instead. This is not surprising, and indeed NGOs in transitional polities are often outlets for people who wish to make a difference but have become disillusioned working in Government. This segment of the population is more likely to create and find employment with NGOs than in other areas.

One comment made during an NGO roundtable was that many NGOs did not have a clear mandate.[7] The perception that some NGOs adapt their mandates in response to annual changes in the focus of donor funding further fuels cynicism about the sector. With USAID's $25 million activity for community-based organizations (CBOs), many NGOs that had not considered that line of work may make adjustments to their charters.

At the same time, we should not forget that there was an NGO movement in Georgia years before there were any donors present to fund them. Some of the first NGOs in late Soviet Georgia focused on the environment. They had no funding but still attracted members and advocated for their cause. Serious grassroots NGOs still remain in Georgia, but the civic awareness of the general population has not kept pace with the growth in the aggregate number of NGOs. Instead, fewer than 50 NGOs have emerged as points of light in a sea of apathetic and disillusioned citizens.

C. NGO Sustainability

The Georgian NGO sector can currently not be sustained with funding solely from domestic sources. All NGOs rely almost completely on funding from international donors. This is true of Tbilisi-based NGOs as well as regional NGOs. This is not surprising, and the international community should not make the mistake of comparing the Georgian context with that of the West. Georgia has no history of corporate or citizen philanthropy. There is no middle-class with discretionary income and there are no incentives for making charitable contributions. Even legislation which would make individual or corporate charitable contributions tax deductible would most likely not change this situation, given the overwhelmingly bleak economic environment. Local fundraising among the population is difficult with roughly half of the population living beneath the official poverty threshold.[8] Attempts

[5] Carothers, Thomas. "Aiding Democracy Abroad." p. 217. 1999
[6] Based on information obtained from an interview with a member of the International Center for Civic Culture on 4/13/01.
[7] NGO roundtable at Horizonti in Tbilisi on 4/5/01.
[8] "Georgia: Poverty and Income Distribution", The World Bank, March 1999.

by the GoG to form a "Georgia Fund" for the purpose of creating Georgian philanthropy failed due to lack of resources. Until the economic situation in Georgia improves, there is no reason to believe that NGOs will be able to sustain themselves from domestic sources.

Local contributions are not unheard of, but appear to occur only on an anecdotal basis. There have apparently been some cases of local, wealthy business people making charitable contributions to NGOs.[9] Even then, the Team learned that such donations were often not widely publicized because individuals do not wish to draw the attention of tax authorities. In another case, an NGO has been able to collect small, monthly payments from households to support a clinic. Such examples are an exception rather than a norm. Over the medium-term, what appears more important than the financial sustainability of individual NGOs or the sector writ large is institutional sustainability – the development of effective, participatory structures capable of giving voice to citizen demands for better governance.

D. NGO Interaction with Government

Somewhat ironically, NGOs have been more successful in affecting policy and decision making at the national level than at the local level. At the national level, there have been several encouraging developments. Some NGOs have actively worked with the GoG to draft a revised NGO law. Several key GoG officials are former NGO members. The Ministry of Justice has established Georgia's first citizen oversight council to help monitor human rights, prison conditions and the Ministry's budget, and President Shevardnadze recently announced the formation of an anti-corruption committee that will be chaired by six high-level government officials and six members of the NGO community.

At the local level, the situation is even bleaker. Although there are some cases of NGOs interacting with local authorities, the nature of the interaction warrants a closer look. Regional NGO interaction with local governments can hardly be described as true cooperation. Rather, it typically consists of an NGO asking local government officials for space, transportation to, or electricity for an event. The Team was unable to obtain information on regional NGOs involved in policy formulation or decision-making at the local level.

One reason for the nature of the relationship described above is that the structures of local government with which NGOs interact are not accountable to citizens. True democratic local self-government ("*sakrebulos*" or city councils and the council chair they appoint) exists only in villages, agglomeration of villages, village/towns, and non-republican cities. However, these officials hold no real power and have little access to resources. Regional NGOs have learned that in order to accomplish anything at the local level requires that they turn to the presidential appointed *rayon gamgebeli* or the region's presidential representative, neither of whom is accountable to citizens.

Citizens have also learned that the *sakrebulos* that they elected are powerless and penniless. A recent focus group analysis of local democracy in Georgia revealed that most citizens feel that local government officials are irrelevant and accomplish little. Many do not believe that the upcoming local elections will improve their lives, do not know who their local representatives are, and do not know when they meet or how to contact them.[10]

A number of meetings held by the Team in the Imereti Region also revealed a questionable attitude of local authorities towards NGOs. The Mayor of Kutaisi, Georgia's second largest city, expressed concern that donors directly fund NGOs. He suggested that funds should flow from the donors to the City who would then pass them on to NGOs. He also felt that NGOs did not really understand the needs of the community and that it would be better if their activities were coordinated by his administration. However, regional authorities are apparently quick to claim credit for NGO programs

[9] Information obtained from a roundtable of NGOs in Akhaltsikhe on 4/3/01. The specific case the Team learned of was that of a businessperson who made a contribution to send a sick child to Europe for treatment.
[10] Focus Group Analysis of Local Democracy in Georgia, National Democratic Institute, March 2001.

they believe are working well. Governor Shashiashvilli of the Imereti Region reportedly takes international visitors to the Danish-funded NGO House in Kutaisi, even though he has not contributed to this project in any way.[11]

The City of Ozurgeti demonstrates an exception to this pattern of relations. Here, NGOs provide legal services to the local government. NGOs train local government employees on how to use computers in return for office space. And NGOs also provide other services to local government such as maintaining certain databases and the drafting of employment contracts.

E. Women and Youth-Oriented NGOs

When reviewing lists of Horizonti registered NGOs, it appears as though women's issues NGOs are substantially represented. However, while "Women's Organizations" represented the largest block of the sample population researched by Horizonti in 1998, almost 80 percent of these NGOs had no annual budget in 1998. In the number of NGO roundtables the Team attended during the course of this assessment, women were not proportionately represented, making up only about 10 percent to 20 percent of the participants. This may partially reflect the fact that women, even if they are unemployed, still have more responsibilities (childcare, cooking, etc.) than men and may therefore be less likely to have time to involve themselves in an NGO. Nevertheless, there were always about one or two female-headed NGOs out of about 10 at the roundtables we attended. Yet these NGOs did not necessarily represent women's issues. For example, one NGO in Akhaltsikhe, called "Democratic Women," actually works with children in an orphanage, rather than on issues of women and democracy. One think tank representative stated that he thought that many people perceived women's concerns as a non-issue imported from the West. He thought that many people felt that other issues, such as education, were more pressing for the country. The Team recommends that women's NGOs that could advocate for increased government accountability and transparency be nurtured, if viable partners can be identified.

F. Other Donors' Assistance to NGOs

The brief time available to the assessment team did not provide the basis for a comprehensive analysis of donor resources flowing to the Georgian NGO sector. However, a cursory overview is possible, based on interviews with select donor representatives.

- The Eurasia Foundation has made more than 195 grants in Georgia for a total of about $4 million since 1995. Grants are made in the areas of civil society, private enterprise development, and public administration and policy. Eurasia plans to continue but did suggest that they would prefer to make grants larger than $35,000.
- The Horizonti Foundation is funded through a subgrant from ISAR at about $700,000 per year. Horizonti provides training and grants to other Georgian NGOs.
- The British Department for International Development (DfID) makes small grants of up to $5,000 in various areas.
- The Open Society Institute (OSI) has been working with NGOs since 1995. In 1999, the most recent year for which the team could obtain information, OSI provided grants to 23 NGOs for a total value of about $200,000. Most grants made were for about $4,000 and were made under the "NGO Awareness, Improvement and Development National Program." The Team learned from OSI that this year they will shift their focus from education to corruption, and to strengthening regional NGOs. However, after meeting with President Shevardnadze in March 2001, George Soros reported that the degree of available funding will depend on OSI's perception of the GoG's commitment to combating corruption.
- The World Bank administers a very small grant program with a total value of about $30,000 each year. The average grant made is for about $8,000, used mostly for information gathering and dissemination activities.

[11] Based on information obtained from an interview with Marianne Knudson of the Danish Refugee Council on 4/6/01.

- The Delegation of the European Union in Georgia has a budget of about 250,000 Euro per year for NGOs. The Delegation intends to discontinue work with humanitarian relief NGOs and increasingly to focus on democracy and human rights NGOs.
- Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) has a relatively large annual budget of about $5 million for NGOs and civil society.

G. CSOs and the Rule of Law

A great deal of work has been done in the area of legal reform through USAID's and other donors' Rule of Law (ROL) activities. The "supply" side of ROL has increased. However, increasing the supply side has not automatically translated to increased "demand" for rule of law. Favorable judgements are sometimes for sale or depend on connections. Full and equitable access to justice does not exist. Many people have no faith in being able to obtain a fair judgement and avoid courts altogether. Even when corruption is uncovered and widely publicized, perpetrators are not brought to justice and, at the most, merely lose their jobs. A corrupt judiciary has contributed to the lack of faith citizens have in their government and rather than confronting it, they avoid it. Civil society development will be very difficult under the current situation. The GoG seems unable or unwilling to address the issue of the stagnating and even regressing reform process. The time has come to increase the demand for reform, and NGOs can be used as a way of exerting pressure on the government to do so.

NGOs are perceived as one of the least corrupt sectors and therefore have moral legitimacy when they speak out against corruption. NGOs can serve to increase public awareness of new laws, and could help monitor adherence to and implementation of the Administrative Code. Because NGOs are perceived as one of the least corrupt sectors they can have considerable moral legitimacy when they speak out against corruption, and play an important role in increasing the demand for transparency and accountability.

One timely example of how this may be done relates to the new Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which entitles citizens to obtain any non-national security-related information from government. The Team learned of a case in Kutaisi where an NGO invoked the FOIA to learn how the Kutaisi municipal government used a grant obtained from an international donor. The NGO learned that the grant was not used as intended and, as a result, the donor launched an investigation. This is not an isolated example. The City of Gori has a coalition of NGOs that cooperate together mainly on FOIA issues. ISFED has challenged what they claim was an illegal privatization of a post office in a community. Private media are reportedly filing requests for information under the FOIA with increasing frequency as well, and at least one NGO is providing assistance to government bodies in developing procedures for responding to requests for information under the FOIA. It should also be noted that the new ROL activity under SO 2.2 will include FOI components.

Another area where NGOs (such as "Article 42") could help increase access to justice is by providing legal defense and advocacy services for the disenfranchised portion of the population such as IDPs, minorities, women, and the indigent. "Watchdog"-type NGOs could also be engaged to monitor court cases. Trial monitoring can serve as a source of information for independent media. Independent media, which operates rather freely in Georgia, could help highlight particularly egregious cases of injustice and corruption, thereby increasing public awareness and pressure on the authorities to act in accordance with law. Trial monitoring could also be a source of information for the international community. At the same time, the international community should be prepared to advocate on behalf of NGOs that find themselves pressured by the GoG in response to their activities.

H. CSOs and Local Governance

If a meaningful local government law is passed, there will be more possibilities for regional NGOs to interact with local governments and to demand accountability and transparency. True reform will mean that local government will be given more authority and more resources to carry out their new

authority. True reform will also mean that local governments will be allowed to retain a greater share of tax revenues raised locally and also have more say on how to program their revenues. Such reform can potentially make more resources available at the local level. According to one account the Team heard, up to 80 percent of funds intended for local education expenditures (teacher salaries, school upkeep, etc.) are siphoned off by layers of bureaucracy through which it must pass before it finally arrives at the local level.

At present, local officials can deflect almost all responsibility for failing to provide municipal services to Tbilisi or the President's regional representatives. A new local government law would make them responsible for issues of direct interest to the communities that elect them. The public will need to be made aware of this, however, because, unless they are informed otherwise, they will continue to look to Tbilisi for solutions to their problems. Access to information in the regions has remained very limited, and understanding government structures formed during communist days remains dominant. NGOs can help increase public awareness of the roles and responsibilities of local governments and can help mobilize public demand for the provision of services. Such an effort would be especially important before the next local elections so that the electorate understands that, this time, they are voting for officials that can really make a difference in their lives.

However, merely providing local authorities with greater administrative and fiscal authority will not automatically result in more transparent and accountable local governance. Georgia has a history of passing but not implementing laws, and traditions of transparent and accountable governance are weak. Getting the laws right (the supply side) will be an important first step, but this step will be insufficient if there is no demand for good governance at the local level. NGOs can play an important role in articulating and channeling community demand. USAID and its partners can support national and local NGOs that work with local governments in identifying priority areas for community investments, and monitor progress. NGOs can help create public awareness of duties the local government is neglecting, and can even work with local independent media to highlight problem areas. NGOs could also help track the transfer of funds from the central to the local level, and promote transparency in local-level budgeting and budget implementation.

Even if progressive local government legislation is not passed, there is still work for NGOs at the local level, although the tasks facing them will be more difficult. Existing laws require local governments to publish and openly discuss their budgets. Some NGOs are already engaging local governments in this area; it has proven to be a topic in which citizens are very interested. Such deliberations directly address such problems as salary disbursement and paid pensions. It is generally easier to shed light on the inner workings of a local government, which is smaller and more accessible to the population than is a national-level ministry. The local budget marks a good starting point for interaction among NGOs, the community, and its government, and should be expanded. It has the potential of greatly increasing transparency and accountability, reducing corruption, getting citizens involved in local government, and generally increasing civic awareness.

Lack of information is a problem about which the Team heard repeatedly while traveling in Georgia's regions. It is a problem not only for NGOs but also for the population at large. Many structures for the distribution of information collapsed along with Soviet Georgia. Print media was once widely available throughout the country and is now limited to larger cities and only to those that can afford to buy a newspaper. And while television and radio ownership is widespread, even in villages, the supply of electricity to operate them is often subject to seasonal outages, sometimes lasting months.[12] A large number of people in Georgia are routinely cut off from developments in government, and an uninformed population is in no position to develop a sense of civic awareness. NGOs could help fill that vacuum and inform the population of new laws and rights that affect their lives, perhaps in cooperation with local media outlets, such as regional Television.

[12] The Team was told that there are areas in Georgia that have not received electricity for five months at a time.

Cooperation between NGOs and the media has already produced some pressure on the government by highlighting corruption. NGOs can provide an alternative source of information for the media. The television program "60 Minutes," which airs on the independent television station Rustavi-2 and the Newspaper *Resonance* have both covered corruption stories. In both cases, they reportedly received at least some of their information from NGOs. Increased cooperation along these lines could help further increase pressure on the GoG to act against corruption.

I. Conclusions and Recommendations for Civil Society Assistance Strategy

The Team recommends that future assistance to the NGO sector be targeted more strategically to NGOs whose efforts are geared to the promotion of more effective, accountable, transparent, and participatory governance at both the national and local levels. A review of grants made to NGOs by the Eurasia Foundation and Horizonti revealed that grants were being made across a very wide range of thematic areas. Grants were made to NGOs such as the "Association for the Revival of Decorative Gardening in Georgia" to research the state of the art of decorative gardening in the country. Other grants were made to the "Our Heritage Foundation" to develop norms for communicating electronically with the Georgian alphabet. While it believes that supporting civil society in all spheres is generally a good thing, the Team feels that the short-term need of increased government accountability and transparency should receive priority at this crucial point in time of Georgia's development.

The under-development of a civil society and the problems of corruption and lawlessness are inextricably intertwined and feed each other in a vicious cycle. Corruption and lawlessness flourish because the Government is not transparent or accountable. The Government is not transparent or accountable because citizens are demoralized and apathetic and do not demand transparency or accountability. Citizen apathy further reduces their oversight of government, contributing to more corruption and further increasing citizen apathy and disengagement. The strengthening of civil society is thus critical from a variety of perspectives.

The Team recommends that larger grants be made to a smaller number of NGOs whose focus is making local and national government more transparent and accountable. A review of grants from Horizonti shows that most grants are for less than $4,000. Eurasia grants are not more than $35,000 but many of them are for much less. Instead of spreading a very thin layer of money over 3,000+ NGOs, more impact can be achieved by targeting the 20 to 50 very active and strong NGOs. Larger grants would allow NGOs to develop even more experience, expertise, and sophistication. They would be able to develop longer-term strategies. It would allow them to attract and retain skilled employees.

The Mission should focus on funding more established NGOs with a proven track record of developing networks and mobilizing volunteers. NGOs that are more democratic in nature and open to the public and to other NGOs should be favored over those that exist largely to secure donor funding. Grant competitions could have public outreach, constituency- and coalition-building foci built in as selective factors. More established NGOs, as recent field research has shown, tend to have larger networks. Such NGOs are also more likely to have volunteers. Larger NGOs with a wide constituency base should have more clout with government in demanding transparency and accountability. They would also be more likely to eventually sustain themselves financially.

More resources should go towards funding regional NGOs. The risk in this approach, however, is that there are as yet few regional NGOs capable of having much impact. Some emphasis might be put on Tbilisi-based NGOs that have or are able to establish branch offices in the regions. The advantage to this approach is that field offices would have greater access to technical, logistical, and administrative support that home offices could provide them with. Field offices could be kept abreast of all the latest developments in their field of advocacy by the mother office.

Although grants should not be made in the absence of an adequate capacity to produce meaningful results, NGO financial sustainability (while important over the long term) should not be a criterion for measuring results at this time. As noted earlier in this section, sustainability is not possible given current economic conditions in Georgia. USAID should view NGOs as providing cost-effective, valuable services that will help achieve development objectives. At the same time, USAID is helping contribute to the development of the third sector until that point in time when it can fully sustain itself. USAID should continue to support work on legislation that would encourage charitable donations to NGOs by both the corporate sector and by individuals. The recommended focus of assistance to NGOs with larger constituencies and membership bases will perhaps contribute over time to increased sustainability, since these organizations are likely to have a better chance of supporting themselves financially than are small NGOs with little or no public support. Support for NGO networks or umbrella organizations might also be considered, were viable partners to be identified.

NGO training and other capacity-building efforts should be made more available in the regions. Care must be taken to ensure that the NGOs selected to receive capacity-building assistance are serious, but also to ensure that the timing and content of assistance is well adapted to their needs. The emphasis in selecting partners and in providing training and support to strengthen institutional capacity should reflect the more narrow thematic focus recommended in this paper: legal advocacy, lobbying, legislative drafting, and effective use of the media. In developing an approach to NGO training, synergies between the various activities funded under Strategic Objectives 2.2 and 2.3 should be considered.

III. MEDIA

A. Analysis of the Media Sector

Media strengthening is key to achieving USAID/Caucasus goals and objectives consistent with the Mission's country strategy shift to "increased attention on impact at the local and individual level." Independent media is a leading source of the information citizens need in order to begin to participate in and benefit from democratic and market reforms. Furthermore, independent media is beginning to play an important watchdog role and is fostering greater government transparency and accountability. Media strengthening assistance is timely, given the rather good enabling environment for press freedom and financial profitability. Of all the 12 NIS former Soviet republics, Georgia has perhaps the best environment for the free flow of information;[13] some independent media outlets are already profitable; and an independent TV network providing viable alternatives to state-sponsored news programs is profitable, popular, and reaches about two-thirds of the population.

However, despite the relatively favorable enabling environment for press freedom and the noteworthy successes of independent media in Georgia to date, it is too early for the Mission to begin to phase out media-strengthening activities. Independent media continue to face a number of obstacles described in more detail below. Furthermore, consolidating gains now will not only serve to support most other Mission objectives that rely on increased transparency and free flow of information, but will also make it more difficult for a regression of press freedoms as has occurred in most other former Soviet republics.

The Rustavi-2 independent TV network, which is perhaps the flagship of Georgian independent broadcast media, provides an example of what is possible. Its development as a financially profitable media outlet providing relatively high-quality independent news reaching approximately two-thirds of the population of Georgia demonstrates a significant achievement. The success of Rustavi-2 is, however, an exception, and should not obscure the depth of the problems facing independent media and prospects for the free flow of information. On the whole, the level of development of broadcast and print media in Georgia is quite low.

Most news programming is of poor technical and professional quality, and most media are struggling to become editorially independent and financially viable. The economic situation makes it particularly difficult for media to be profitable, especially outside of Tbilisi. Some local TV stations are just beginning to turn a profit, as are some print publications, although the latter are less likely to offer quality objective news. The poor economic situation is largely to blame for lack of advertising, but many businesses are reluctant to advertise for fear of attracting the attention of tax inspectors or Mafia, and media managers lack the skills and knowledge to attract advertisers and manage business operations.

Most people own TVs and radios, but newspaper circulation remains low due to the high cost for the average citizen. Printing press and distribution monopolies add to the cost of production by, for example, forcing local newspapers to be printed in other cities and transported long distances. A variety of infrastructure problems further inhibit the development of independent media. Most media operate with outdated equipment and cannot access capital to purchase new equipment or make investments. Interruptions in electrical supply disrupt production and cut off broadcast media from their audience.

In addition to economic, legal, and political problems, the media sector suffers from low professionalism, ethics, and sectoral support. Even among journalists and editors, the concept of a

[13] Georgia ranks the highest of the former Soviet republics (excluding the three Baltic states) in the Freedom House Press Freedom Survey 2000, a widely accepted and reputable source for measuring press freedom. On a scale from 0 (completely free) to 100 (completely not free), Georgia scored 47, significantly better than the next best former Soviet republics Armenia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine, which scored between 57 and 60.

truly independent media fulfilling a watchdog role is still lacking. Professional associations, when they do exist, are typically weak due to mistrust, competition, and a lack of understanding of the benefits of associations. Low wages and a lack of incentives encourage reporters to accept payment for stories and provide limited impetus for effective investigative journalism.

Although the legal enabling environment for independent media is generally good, especially compared to other countries in the E&E region, independent media cannot rely on the legal system to protect and enforce their rights, and many significant legal problems remain. Self-censorship is widespread, primarily due to fear of potential repercussions from government officials and/or criminal groups. Media often face legal challenges from the government and journalists are sued for libel. Less common, but just as serious, are overt threats and violence against journalists. A freedom of information provision of the new administrative code is already being effectively used by the media, as are other laws that protect and promote freedom of speech, but other laws and regulations, such as those governing licensing, remain impediments to the growth and profitability of independent media.

For the most part, Georgian media do not adequately respond to youth and women's issues and interests. As noted above, the low level of professionalism is the reason why most media don't realize either the business benefits or the public service aspect of targeting groups such as women and youth. Independent media that receive training and assistance from USAID partners seem to be changing in this regard and are collaborating with women's and youth CSOs in developing programming.

The general feeling among those interviewed for this assessment was that independent national and local media will likely continue to play an increasingly important role in informing citizens and acting as a watchdog. Assuming at least minimal improvements in the economy, local media will be able to gradually increase revenues, although profitability for most, especially print media, will remain elusive for many more years due to the overall weak economy in the country. Barring any significant political changes, and with continued support from donors, independent media should be able to continue to increase the quality and quantity of local news and investigative journalism. Censorship, self-censorship, and other affronts to media independence will likely continue, although opinions differ on whether the general trend will improve or worsen. Media professionals in the regions were more likely to suggest that the situation will improve, while those in Tbilisi were more pessimistic, warning that buy-outs of independent media and/or pressure on media would increase in advance of the parliamentary and presidential elections. Similarly, the legal environment will likely continue to guarantee freedom of speech, but the jury is still out on enforcement, and future legislation may determine the extent to which media will be pluralistic and profitable.

B. Other Donor Programs

USAID is presently the primary donor providing funding for programs to strengthen independent media, with most assistance being implemented through USAID partners Internews and the International Center for Journalism (ICFJ). The Eurasia Foundation also provides assistance through grants to independent media and CSOs that promote press freedom. The U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Section plans to award a grant to a U.S. NGO to assist with development of a journalism school, resulting in a certificate program for practicing journalists.[14]

The Soros Foundation is the major non-USG donor, providing assistance through small grants to independent media and media CSOs. A few other donors provide relatively limited media assistance. For example, the French Embassy has offered training for journalists at a media training institute in France.

[14] USAID should begin to work with the Embassy PAS to share ideas on the new journalism school program at GIPA, to assist the PAS in obtaining buy-in from other donors active in the sector, and to set the stage for cooperation and possible future support to the school.

C. Recommendations for USAID Strategy

The best prospects for achievement in the media sector are in local television, so media assistance should focus on supporting independent local TV. Rustavi-2 network is serving as a source of national news, so the biggest information gap is at the local level. Most people own TVs and get their news from TV, local TV stations are more likely than local print media to become financially self-sustaining in the short-term, and local TV stations have already demonstrated the important role they play in demanding and promoting transparent and accountable governance, the main problem that this assessment recommends targeting (see "Sample Media Success Stories" in Annex 3).

Even more emphasis should be placed on media law and advocacy components, such as providing legal counsel to independent media, tracking violations of press freedom, and assisting with efforts to improve relevant legislation. Assistance should include support to human rights CSOs, media watchdog groups, and media associations that defend freedom of speech, advocate for greater press freedom, and effectively represent journalists and independent media through lobbying, legal counsel, and advocacy. Assistance could be provided by the Eurasia Foundation, the new IRIS ROL contract, or a program that supports legal and advocacy CSOs as per the recommendations in the Civil Society section of this report.

Similarly, continued or more support should be provided for media to conduct investigative journalism. Journalists could certainly benefit from additional training in how to conduct investigative reporting; however, it must be noted that the main reason for the low quantity and quality of such reporting is the high cost of such investigations to both reporters and owners. Because reporters typically are paid by the story, few can afford to spend the time necessary for proper research, and owners/editors typically decide they cannot afford the necessary costs for staff, travel, research, legal fees, and other expenses related to investigative journalism. Investigative journalism grants to well-established independent media outlets would likely improve the quantity and quality of such reporting.

Assistance providers should continue and expand efforts to make linkages between media and other USAID assistance areas, especially CSO-strengthening, local government, elections, and rule of law. This could be achieved not only by the media assistance providers, but also through joint activities and grants from Urban Institute, IRIS, Horizonti, and other DG partners. For example, training for local government officials or CSOs on how to effectively access the media could be held jointly with training for journalists on how to cover local government or CSOs.

USAID should consider providing more training for journalists in specialized topics, such as economics, law, local government, business, financial markets, the energy sector, and corruption. Journalists seldom specialize in one topic, and are typically uninformed about the issues they cover. For media to provide more balanced and useful information to the public, they should have a better understanding of the complex issues on which they report.

Media assistance providers should (continue to) emphasize the business value of having special programming that targets women and youth. Furthermore, assistance programs should include training on how to analyze and address gender issues both in general (e.g., equal pay, work conditions) and specific to the media sector (e.g., that women are not considered able camera operators). Given that USAID's media assistance strategy focuses on media as an end rather than a means, it would be more appropriate if direct funding for production of special youth or gender programming was provided under other USAID assistance activities. For example, it would be more appropriate for NDI to fund production of a youth political radio talk show, or for Johns Hopkins to produce a women's health TV program. This should not preclude Internews or ICFJ from collaborating on such activities, but the USAID media partners arguably should maintain a focus on strengthening independent media, rather than using media as a means for producing and disseminating programming.

Near-term prospects for print media are less bright, but targets of opportunity in this area could have significant benefits. The problems facing print media are more complex and long-term than those facing broadcast media, and it is more difficult for independent print media to become financially self-sustaining; at least one newspaper that received a donor grant folded as soon as the grant ended. Furthermore, although print media provides unique contributions to increasing the flow of information in Georgia, they reach a much smaller percentage of the population. Although the current print media assistance program could produce some tangible improvements in the sector, support for print media would likely be more successful if it was targeted to a limited number of regions or newspapers. For example, focusing exclusively on developing one or two newspapers might do more to help overcome economic and legal obstacles and raise standards that will pave the way for other newspapers at a later date. There are, however, many risks to such an approach, including undermining the development of other independent newspapers by giving one paper an unfair market advantage, and the risk of funding a paper that eventually becomes influenced or purchased by non-democratic entities. One possible compromise would be to support the publication of a "student" newspaper that is planned in conjunction with the new PAS-funded journalism program at GIPI. Targeted support for one good newspaper could have a much bigger impact on Georgian print media than diffuse/diverse assistance to many newspapers all around the country.

Similarly, short-term prospects for the construction of media professional associations are dim, but targets of opportunity in this area could have significant benefits. Deep-seated mistrust, competition, and other factors will likely remain formidable obstacles to the formation of viable associations representing a large membership base nationwide, but media assistance providers should be prepared to support valid associations where reasonable. For example, a small regional journalist association in Kutaisi is unlikely to spawn a national association, but it appears to be effective at the local level. Similarly, media assistance providers should continue to support ad hoc efforts initiated by a broad array of editors/owners/journalists to address one specific issue, such as lobbying for or against particular legislation, even if the cooperation ends after the effort is concluded.

Given the significant potential for strengthening independent TV and the much more limited prospects for positive changes at State TV, the strategy should continue to support independent TV and not target State TV. This does not mean that journalists or managers from State TV should be categorically excluded from training programs, but that media assistance resources for the time being are better spent targeting independent TV.

Media assistance to radio should not be a priority at this time. Again, given the tremendous potential for strengthening independent TV, radio should be a lower priority for several reasons. State radio reaches most of the country, but private/independent radio does not. Independent TV covers most of the same population areas as private radio. The quality and quantity of news on TV is also greater than radio. That being said, limited assistance to radio stations that produce news and informational programming should be continued only if it can be done without taxing existing resources, much as Internews is now doing.

IV. POLITICAL PARTIES AND PROCESSES

A. Review of Georgian Political Parties

At the end of the first decade of Georgian independence in the post-Soviet era, several positive developments related to political parties should be highlighted. Given Georgia's violent early history, it is noteworthy that none of the leading political parties, nor most smaller parties farther from the political center, advocate violence. All express a commitment to using electoral processes to determine the country's leadership and none have advocated violence, even following the flawed elections of 1999 and 2000. The country's tenuous stability has not been weakened by political party machinations, as is at times the case in other countries emerging from conflicts. The legal framework regulating political parties does not unduly restrict political competition, and none of those interviewed expressed concerns regarding party registration. To the contrary, even those most critical of the ruling party conceded that the law regulating political parties does not constrain political competition, either in its letter or application. Moreover, the parties provide meaningful roles and responsibilities for many younger members.

Several of the major political parties reportedly have fairly active youth wings, relative to the size of the particular party. Specifically named were those of CUG, Socialists, and NDP. In addition, younger party activists have been placed on party lists and in the case of the CUG, and given positions of authority within the government. Also with regard to membership diversity, while women's participation in parties remains much less than that of men, anecdotal evidence from several interviewees seems to highlight that younger women are becoming more involved in parties and youth branches, in comparison to older cohorts. Lastly, as a result of USAID assistance through NDI and IRI, the political parties are running increasingly sophisticated campaigns involving more savvy campaign messages and targeting specific localities to maximize limited party resources. These developments should not be overlooked.

Despite these developments of the past decade, Georgia's principal political parties continue to be plagued by serious internal weaknesses. The weaknesses repeatedly identified by interviewees from a range of backgrounds relate to almost all the core attributes of representative, dynamic democratic political parties:

- lack of internal party democracy and meaningful distribution of power within the party;
- no effort to develop meaningful party platforms with messages tied to specific policy resolutions distinct from those of other parties;
- little attention to membership development and understanding of the role of members in an effective party;
- under-representation of women within party membership and leadership;
- weak constituency relations;
- failure to consistently separate elected party representatives from responsibilities related to party management; and
- ineffective two-way communication mechanisms within parties.

Parties do no have specific platforms linked to detailed legislative and advocacy agendas. Parties and their elected representatives are not effectively using their position in the parliament to advance a clear agenda. As a result, the great majority of legislation currently comes from the executive, rather than from members of parliament.

Many interviewees provided vague answers to questions regarding the functions and activities of their party chapter and the relationships between different chapters (horizontally or vertically). Those that offered direct responses described party meetings to prepare for the bi-annual CUG conference during which local levels provided "activity briefings" to be filters up to the top of the party apparatus. Not mentioned was discussion of electorate concerns, party policy options, recommendations for party

leadership or the reporting of upper levels to lower levels. Although at least one party reportedly has rules to promote more effective two-way communication, the Team found little evidence of their utilization during this two-week assessment.

These criticisms can be applied to all parties, except CUG, which has a stronger membership base. The ruling party has regional chapters and a youth wing which are much stronger than those within other parties. Indeed, CUG is the only party that has chapters throughout the country and is likely to field candidates in each district. However, most regional chapters of Georgia's various political parties are minimally active, except in pre-election periods. A few party activists claimed that they organized numerous general party meetings, conducted regular site visits, and sought to engage the media to reach out to constituents. However, most interviewees and other research (e.g., NDI's recent focus group study) indicate that such activities are quite limited.

In the face of these profound problems, observers suggest that interest in serious organizational reform remains limited. Most analysts note that party leaderships have to date taken few concrete actions that can be viewed as meaningful first steps towards building effective, internally democratic organizations, capable of presenting the voting public with credible, differentiated platforms. Party activists, civic leaders, and expatriate experts view the vast majority of party leaders as self-interested politicians seeking power for power's sake and personal benefit, with little interest in democratization and democratic parties effectively representing citizen interests. In fact, no interviewee outside of political parties expressed any confidence that either the leadership of political parties or a critical mass of their membership would mobilize within the foreseeable future to address the range of weaknesses within their organizations. According to several party activists, the number of active reformers with the parties is limited, and they are geographically dispersed, making it extremely difficult for them to unify and exert effective pressure on party leadership. To the extent that organizational reform initiatives are initiated, observers suggest they are more the result of struggles between leaders for control of parties, than efforts to bring about significant changes in party structures. Hence, the opportunities for meaningful reform of political party structures appear limited under present conditions.

It also appears that parties are disinclined to recognize the importance of these issues and the need to address them in order to gain public trust, confidence, and support. When asked why most surveys and studies show tremendous public distrust in political parties, most political party leaders at the national and local levels attributed this phenomenon to an ill-informed and unrealistic public. Most Georgians, it was said, expect a party to care for all aspects of their lives, as in Soviet times, and have not adjusted to the realities of post-independence. Moreover, the suspicion that many held towards the communist party is now applied more generally to political parties as a whole. In addition, the rapid proliferation of parties following independence has led to a widespread perception that many parties represent little more than the personal aspirations of party leaders for political power.

Parties are accused of having made countless promises during these first few years, few of which (if any, some would assert) have been fulfilled by those elected. This criticism appears generally fair. Most Georgians would agree that elected officials have failed to live up to their promises. However, it does not adequately explain why most of the Georgian public has no faith in parties across the board. The reported failures of those elected need not necessarily be attributed to those who did not secure an office. For that reason, while public understanding of the function of political parties in the post-communist era may perhaps be weak, the Team would argue that great public skepticism in parties must be attributed in large part to the parties themselves and the weaknesses highlighted above. In a poignant reflection of the depth of dissatisfaction with the current state of political parties, several elected *Sakrebulo* councilors interviewed by the Team, who themselves were party representatives, stressed the importance of allowing independent candidates to run for office so as to enable the election of "more honorable individuals." They did not believe that in the current environment many individuals of high caliber were joining parties.

With the exception of the CUG and Revival, most parties have difficulties securing funding for political activities. This is in part a function of legal constraints on sources of party finance, of resource constraints in the broader economy, and of organizational issues. The ruling party reportedly receives financing from a small group of successful businesspersons. Other parties appear to rely on either the wealth of their party chair or meager contributions from party supporters. Several interlocutors, including a few well-placed individuals, stated that much of the money financing party activity comes from the "shadow economy" and that those who accepted these resources could not remain uncorrupted.

While the problem of party financing through "clean avenues" is very real, the team would argue that a committed party leadership could take small strides towards creating more democratic and effective organizations with meager resources, if the political will existed to address these problems. For example, the presence of independent media including papers and TV stations outside the capital does provide an important means through which a party can amplify its voice for free. In fact, one party leader noted that while the development of a large party required the ability to pay for advertising, parties can indeed meaningfully capitalize on the "free airtime" that TV news programs and print publications provide to communicate with party members and the electorate in general.

The role of women also deserves special attention, since women appear to be significantly underrepresented in Georgian politics. While the parties are generally weak at representing constituent voices and consulting citizens, regardless of gender, the voice for women and by women is limited by their marginalization to "service roles" within the party. The representation of women's interests is further limited because many women choose not to participate in party politics, and because there are few men who actively seek to represent both male and female concerns. Strategies to increase women's participation must address these issues. In addition, increasing women's interest in becoming political activists will not only require them to view parties as credible organizations, but also overcome the social norms steering them away from "dirty politics."

The preceding paragraphs portray weak parties with limited commitment to addressing their weaknesses. As to what might impel greater interest within at least some parties to develop more democratic and effective organizations, it was believed by most that the emergence of the New Faction (or other prominent factions) would result in insignificant change. Rather, many interlocutors felt that only President Shevardnadze's departure from the political scene would spur Georgian political parties to change their modus operandi. Some less dramatic change might also result from the passage of the law regulating party caucuses. If reformist members of a few parties are able to use the caucus law to either goad the party leadership into implementing a party revitalization agenda, or put into place new leadership that would seek to revamp the party, then that would create an environment where USAID assistance might have a greater likelihood of impact. One interviewee did specifically mention that he and some colleagues intended to use the law, if passed, to press for a party caucus so that members would be vested with greater power. However, such a development is dependent on many factors, such as the availability of financing for the caucuses; the fair administration of caucuses; and the selection of candidates who, as a result of the caucus, are different from those who would have been selected by the party leadership – none of which are certain to happen.

Two other legal reforms might stimulate reform within the parties. First, if the law empowered elected *sakrebulo* councilors (with control over some key services and budgetary authorities over those services) or if the *gamgebelis* (who currently are the "real" authorities at the local level) became elected, the development of party branches may be perceived as more important to increase the party's success at the ballot box. Such reforms in local government might also strengthen the voice of local party activists and elected leaders vis-à-vis the national secretariat and force the creation of new communication mechanisms as well as a redistribution of authority within the party. Second, substantive electoral reform that dramatically limits the possibilities of fraud could create an environment for a more meaningful electoral competition. Parties would have to focus more intensively on winning voter support. Activists who feel disheartened by current electoral fraud and

are reluctant to invest their time in an effort that they perceive is doomed to fail under the current electoral framework may be ignited.

B. Other Donors

USAID is one of the few donors that supports in-depth political party development programs. In Georgia, USAID is the lead donor in this domain, and has been the only donor providing continuous, year-round support to strengthen the democratic and representative character of Georgian political parties. The Fredrick Ebert Stiftung, the E.U., and the Conservative Party of Great Britain have funded small projects such as equipment purchases and conferences, but these are isolated, infrequent efforts to support political party development.

C. Recommendations Relative to Political Party Assistance

Based on the research of this team, interviewees said little to suggest that USAID and its NGO partners can at present have a sustained impact on how political parties operate and effectively advocate for citizen interests and vital needs. This appears largely due to the absence of strong internal constituencies for party reform. As we have suggested above, limited political will for reform appears to exist, particularly among the national leadership who dominate decision making. Hence, while the need for improvement within Georgia's parties is great, the team recommends that in the absence of such a constituency, party development efforts not be given priority among the areas of D/G program emphasis.

To the extent that resources remain available, party development and strengthening efforts might be continued on a limited scale, with the aim of encouraging the development of internal constituencies for reform, particularly at lower levels. Thus the focus of activities should be increasingly on the development of regional and local party structures, and on programs targeted to increasing the involvement of women and youth in party leadership. Such an approach is consistent with the overall thrust of the present assessment, which recommends that programs focus increasingly on stimulating local-level *demand-side pressure* for transparent, accountable, and responsive governance. To the extent that party assistance programming is continued, it should be with the clear understanding that, although important, interventions of this nature will only bear fruit over the longer term.

However, a threefold rationale can be provided. First, political parties constitute an important element of any healthy democracy. Although only a very small group of reformers exist within the parties, they tend to be younger and often aggregated with the youth wings. These individuals are going to be the leaders of tomorrow. While the impact in the near term is likely to be limited, the small investment may create fertile ground for a later date. Second, other donors are emphasizing support for NGOs and justice-related issues, and few directly support political party development. In contrast, USAID's partners, NDI and IRI, implement some of the most "state-of-the-art" party programs. USAID thus has a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other donors in this sector, and is meeting a need. Third, since Georgian political parties have faced an election each year for the past four years, their lack of attention to organizational development is, to a degree, understandable. USAID experience with party development efforts elsewhere suggests the utility of recognizing the political demands that electoral contests place on party activists. Therefore, following the forthcoming local elections, a unique period of 1 to 1 ½ years presents itself wherein Georgian parties will not be tied up in election campaigning. USAID can use this period to determine whether it and its grantees can capture the attention of party activists to address some of their organizational weaknesses.

For these reasons, some party assistance should be considered. Should budget or personnel constraints emerge, the political party program could be scaled down with little impact on the overall portfolio's performance. Indeed, a variety of other program foci also provide indirect support for the development of political parties. Through parliamentary strengthening activities, elected party officials are receiving training on such issues as developing parliamentary agendas and improving constituency relations. Similarly, NGO training and capacity-building efforts focused on advocacy,

membership development, public outreach, coalition building, and communication with local branches and citizens are likely to develop skills that are in large part transferable to the challenges of building more effective parties. It is to be expected that there is considerable fluidity of membership between parties and civic organizations where avenues of political participation have been historically constrained. This appears to be the case in Georgia. One CUG representative stated quite definitively that many members of the party's youth branch hold positions in NGOs. Those civic activists not currently tied to parties often later move into parties and compete for elected office.

Because, by most accounts, the lion's share of reform-oriented party activists (to the extent to which they exist) are younger Georgians, USAID's program should focus on youth within parties, particularly in the regions where chapters are so weak. The vitality of an effective democratic political party stems in large part from the strength of its local branches. If strong national political parties capable of unifying Georgians from different regions around common concerns are to emerge, the parties themselves must focus increasingly on developing local-level organizational structures, and must move beyond Tbilisi. USAID should therefore focus its efforts in a similar direction.

Finally, USAID and its partners should periodically review the selection of which parties are invited to participate in USAID-supported activities. There is not an obvious line dividing Georgia's "primary and most viable parties" from the secondary ones. Beyond CUG and Revival, only two others have more than a few MPs. Several additional parties are not represented in parliament, but have a healthy representation on several *sakrebulos*. The Agency's forthcoming policy guidance on political parties recommends an inclusive approach, but acknowledges that cost limitations require an objective narrowing of the field. The Mission should review the policy guidance and discuss with its implementing partners which Georgian parties should enjoy USAID assistance.

V. ELECTORAL PROCESSES

A. Analysis of Election Administration

While no election is perfect, Georgia's 1998 local elections are considered by most analysts to have been the country's best administered elections to date. One explanation for why this was the high water mark was that the parties, particularly the ruling party, did not view the elections as being of great importance. The CUG reportedly felt quite secure in its ability to garner votes and there was an awareness among many within the party leadership that the elected councils would have little power. Hence, in general, there was little attempt on the part of most parties to fraudulently affect the election process, and officials proceeded to administer the contest according to the guidelines provided. Following a fairly credible administration, opposition parties successfully gained a strong foothold in, if not control of, many *sakrebulos*, including those of several major towns.

The dynamics surrounding the parliamentary elections the following year were quite different. First, while the ruling party still won a healthy share of *sakrebulo* seats, its performance in the local elections was not as strong as many within CUG had hoped. Second, the parliamentary elections represented a more important political contest. Unlike *sakrebulos* that have little authority and remain outside the national spotlight, the legislature has national visibility and important powers related to executive oversight and law-making. Third, many within Georgia, including the political elite, viewed the parliamentary elections as effectively a referendum not only on the CUG, but also on the president himself. These factors all fueled an intense political competition that impelled supporters of all parties to pursue unethical and often illegal means to secure victory.

However, only the ruling party had the power to control the elections administrative structure, save in Ajara where Revival supporters dominate the state apparatus. By most accounts from domestic and international observers, that control over the election administration was abused. Some problems could arguably be the result of poor technical administration – i.e., confusing requirements for candidate registration resulting in candidate applications that had substantively minor mistakes but were nevertheless thrown out on technical grounds. Other flaws in the process are difficult to characterize as anything other than efforts to manipulate the vote.

Such actions became more widespread with the 2000 presidential elections. Both the OSCE and the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly delegation noted serious irregularities in the conduct of the 2000 elections, including instances of ballot stuffing, media bias, and lack of transparency in vote counting and tabulation. During the pre-election period, the voter registration process was flawed, with registries posted the night before the election and credible reports of the existence of secondary lists. Allegations were also made that police pressured opposition candidates directly or through their family members during the campaign period.

The quality of the 1995 and 1998 elections demonstrate that a degree of technical competence does exist within Georgia. However, some remaining weaknesses undermine effective administration. The CEC secretariat lacks the internal capacity to organize systematic training for district and precinct commissioners as well as polling station officials. There is a limited understanding of the importance of advance planning to avoid problems that may inadvertently have the effect of disenfranchising elements of the electorate. As with all public offices in Georgia, low, irregularly paid wages propel many electoral officials to vest less time in the formal jobs, particularly when other earning opportunities present themselves. Nevertheless, analysts of elections administration issues almost universally noted that while technical weaknesses persist, particularly at lower levels, an adequately trained cadre of professionals exists within the CEC secretariat and even among the commissions themselves to oversee a credible electoral contest.

Political rather than administrative factors appear to account for the declining quality of recent elections. For many observers, the political will to hold transparent and open elections is lacking.

Most election staff from the local to national level are believed to be, at best, passive actors, willing to follow directions from above, regardless of whether those directions undermine a fair administration of elections. Unfortunately, appropriate direction "from above" is not being provided. Reportedly, the commissioners themselves are inactive and the chairman is viewed as ineffective.

The Georgian Central Election Commission has broad authority over the administration of elections. Ideally, the commission would use its authority to address pressing problems. It would, *inter alia*, provide the leadership necessary to ensure more competitive and fair elections, ensure that the voter registry is posted 10 days before the election (as is required by law), issue procedures for how citizens can ask for names to be removed from lists, and institute measures to increase ballot-box and tabulation list security. Thus far it has failed to do so, although many easy solutions are available. The IFES country director has sought for several months to obtain records of commission meetings to no avail. She surmised that the lack of transparency was likely related either to the absence of records or to the trivial nature of these meetings.

Were the CEC to attempt to take action, it is unclear that it could enforce respect for its regulations among local election administrators, the police, and other government officials. Many observers suggest that current local election officials and other government actors are the heart of the problem, instigating many of the electoral violations. Broad concerns regarding political bias are reinforced by the comments of several qualified senior election administrators who discount commitment to fair, competent election management on the part of the CEC and other government officials.

This responsibility vacuum within the CEC and the government (and arguably the lack for electoral reform to date) cannot be solely blamed on the ruling party. While dominated by members of the ruling party, it must be noted that no interviewee could confirm if, or specifically how, any commissioner, regardless of party, was using his position on this critical body to press for reform. Moreover, when party activists were asked to discuss their concerns about the elections process and how their parties were seeking to resolve those concerns, no one provided details of any specific advocacy initiatives to promote reform – except that party leaders in Tbilisi were commenting publicly on the topic. The Team found little evidence that these public comments are tied to thoughtful, sophisticated plans to impel electoral reform.

The Assessment Team's interlocutors attributed this lack of response to pressure for improved elections administration to two factors:

- the Revival party, the most effective counterweight to the CUG, controls all government structures in Ajara, including the elections apparatus, and benefits from that control; and
- other parties' leaders are rumored to "cut deals" with members of the establishment that personally benefit them but do not serve the organizational interests of the parties.

Regardless of whether these explanations are correct, the reality remains that until only recently, no dramatic efforts were taken by those in government or the other parties to address the serious flaws in Georgia's electoral process. Yet, activists and leaders from various parties, including CUG, have expressed the profound need for electoral reform in order to overcome public cynicism and rebuild faith in the Georgian state as a whole.

B. Other Donors

USAID is also the lead donor in Georgia for election assistance. The British embassy provided some modest resources to support mobilization of younger voters, and the European Union purchased some equipment for the CEC. Otherwise, other donors' elections assistance has been contained largely to international election observation. USAID alone has a comprehensive elections program addressing the electoral legal framework, elections administration, domestic and international observation as well as voter education and mobilization.

C. Recommendations Relative to Electoral Assistance

The greatest need with regard to the electoral process is to support efforts to strengthen the independence of election administrations, to increase the checks within the system to decrease fraud and to pursue redress in the case of clear violations. Therefore, the Team recommends that USAID should provide assistance to Georgians actively seeking to create political pressure on the government and the parliament to improve both the legislation governing elections administration and the effective implementation of that administration. Since the Mission already has two existing grants (those with NDI and IRI) that are working with key actors involved in electoral processes, the DG team should review the objectives of those grants and discuss in detail with those partners if and how the objectives related to the electoral process might be better achieved. Any new activities or tactics should be captured within modified work plans.

It may well be difficult for civil society to unite with political leaders to push through substantive electoral reform, even with USAID assistance. Yet, given extreme public cynicism about the electoral process and concerns regarding how that cynicism may erode the depth of commitment to the integrity of the Georgian state, USAID must continue to partner with those Georgians who seek meaningful electoral reform. Depending on political developments, that may mean activities supporting only civic advocacy or, should the government or parties demonstrate through action greater interest in electoral reform, support to those institutions. This effort to support a strong lobby for reform is more important than USAID assistance for political party development. As noted earlier, several interviewees noted that political parties have little incentive to seriously evaluate themselves if they believe that in the end, those in government controlling the elections apparatus will ensure that the incumbent wins.

To strengthen the case for the need for electoral reform, USAID should support a robust domestic observation effort, including media monitoring. Domestic monitoring efforts in Georgia have demonstrated the capacity of local organizations to launch nationwide observation missions not only for Election Day itself, but also thorough observation of the pre- and post-election process. Documenting, in detail, the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral process can provide advocates for reform powerful data to better refine their priorities for change and to more dramatically press their case.

Should the promulgation of a universal elections code (UEC) entail dramatic revisions that substantively increase the independence of the CEC and reduce the number of areas that are currently ill-defined and provide openings for abuse, continued support to the CEC should be provided. The CEC would then be in a position to institutionalize sound election administration procedures with adequate protections against abuse and fraud (e.g., establishment of a training unit, creation of internal evaluation and fraud-prevention mechanisms, etc.). However, should the election administration apparatus remain largely under the control of the government, the Mission should seriously examine the opportunity cost of continued partnership with the CEC. As noted above, many analysts interviewed stated that a sufficient critical mass exists who know how to do the job; the problems with the electoral process were emphatically characterized as problems of political will and a lack of independence. Knowledgeable observers have suggested that the central issue determining the quality of elections is not a lack of skills, but rather a willingness on the part of well-placed officials to perpetrate electoral fraud. It is the assessment of this Team that if the present deficit in political will persists beyond the forthcoming local elections, USAID should seriously consider discontinuing its support to the CEC. Additional issues the Mission may wish to consider in crafting assistance in this area are noted in Annex 5.

Annex 1

USAID/Caucasus/Georgia Civil Society Assessment
Including NGO Development, Independent Media and Political Processes

Scope of Work

Summary

The purpose of this Scope of Work is to assess USAID/Caucasus current activities funded under SO 2.3, "More Efficient and Responsive Local Governance," which do not specifically address local governance: i.e. civil society, media, and political processes. This Assessment will result in possible re-tooling of SO 2.3; recommendations will form the basis of finalizing the Mission's Performance Monitoring Plan.

Assessing these three different sectors of democracy assistance (civil society, media, and political processes) will be completed in step-wise fashion:

1. Activity Review
2. Recommendations for SO 2.3 Strategy

The assessment will describe the general environment for the development of the identified sectors, analyze trends of development, constraints, needs and successes; evaluate attitudes of constituents as well as examine the specific USAID assistance programs. The assessment will also take into consideration activities funded by other USAID/Caucasus Strategic Objectives (with particular emphasis on SO 1.3, "Accelerated Development and Growth of Private Enterprise;" and SO 3.1: "Reduced Human Suffering in Targeted Communities"), as well as other international donor programs supporting the development of the identified sectors. Based on the findings, the team will make specific strategic and programmatic recommendations to the Mission regarding the context and the level of funding for the future activities under SO2.3.

This Assessment responds to USAID/Washington's directive (July 1999)[15], which states:

> **CIVIL SOCIETY:** The Mission proposed to begin closeout of civil society activities in 2002. Program Objective Team (POT) 2.1 viewed the discussions of progress in consolidating a strong civil society sector, in both the strategy and R4, as overly optimistic. While there have been improvements in building NGO capacity, the POT doubted that the job of establishing sustainable NGO and independent media sectors would be close to completion by 2002 and that further USAID support would be required. The Mission did not concur with this assessment. In addition, it argued that civil society concerns would continue to be addressed throughout association and NGO building under other strategic objectives (SOs), such as SOs 1.3, 2.3, and 3.1. However, the Mission agreed with POT 2.1 to assess the issue of sustainability for NGO s and independent media during FY 2001 to confirm whether a phaseout of civil society in 2002 makes sense. The results of this assessment will be reported in the R4 submitted in 2001.

Background

USAID/Caucasus Strategic Objective 2.3 More Efficient and Responsive Local Governance focuses on devolution of power to the regions of Georgia. This objective supports regional self-government initiatives, combined with promoting vibrant civil society, a free and independent mass media, and continued assistance for political processes. However, the major focus, as reflected in the results' framework, is the development of local governance and partnerships at regional level. Civil society activities, including NGOs development, support for independent media, and assistance for political

[15] Cable 136903, July 99, Washington, DC.

processes, are not well reflected in the intermediate results. In addition, the strategy envisioned a phase-out of funding for NGO and Media strengthening activities.

This Civil Society Assessment is crucial for future strategic programming in USAID/Caucasus Democracy and Governance sector in Georgia. Moreover, the Assessment has been mandated by the EE Bureau. Finally, it may lead to retooling the strategic objective. The development of meaningful performance measuring indicators for SO 2.3 is closely connected with the results and recommendations of the Civil Society Assessment.

USAID's Assistance

During the past four years, USAID/Caucasus/Georgia has provided extensive assistance to the development of vibrant civil society. USAID has provided technical assistance in the form of training, consultations, information dissemination, grants, and study tours tailored to the needs of the particular sector. The main implementing partners in the effort have been ISAR/Horizonti, Internews, ICFJ, NDI, IRI, IFES, and the Eurasia Foundation.

Objectives and Tasks

The principal objective of this assessment shall be (1) analyzing the contribution that these three sets of activities make to USAID/Caucasus' portfolio, and (2) elaborating specific recommendations for the USAID SO 2.3 strategy. Creative and culturally appropriate approaches should be incorporated into the assessment to ensure that USAID assistance is fully acceptable for counterparts as well as results oriented.

Specific tasks for each area are identified below:

1. NGO Development

- Is NGO development key to achieving USAID/Caucasus goals and objectives? Why, or why not?
- Analysis of the level of development of the sector in Tbilisi and in the regions of Georgia, the differences and commonalties. Are NGOs viable? Sustainable? What will best assist them in their development? Are they actively building a vibrant civil society in Georgia? If not, how can this best be fostered? Major trends, constraints, needs of the sector
- Institutional development of NGOs: How many NGOs have demonstrated "sustainability" (i.e. receiving assistance from other than USAID sources) over time? Have individual NGOs grown since their inception? What is their client base? Are they reaching out to constituents?
- Prospects for future development: Is it likely that NGOs will continue in Georgia during the short, medium, and long-term? How will they evolve?
- Are youth actively involved in NGO development? Are women involved? If so, how? If youth and/or women were more involved, how would this sector benefit? How could such involvement be fostered?
- Donor Assistance: Who are the major funders of NGO development? What is their annual level of commitment? How long have they been funding this sector, and how long do they plan to continue?
- Recommendations on the nature and focus of future USAID assistance
- Recommendations regarding the design of activities and strategy for SO 2.3

2. Media Strengthening

- Is strengthening independent media key to achieving USAID/Caucasus goals and objectives? Why, or why not?
- Level of development of broadcast and print media in Tbilisi and in the regions, differences and commonalties
- Major trends, constraints, needs and successes

- Does media respond to youth and women's issues? Why or why not? How could gender and youth be better incorporated into this sector?
- Quality of journalism, issue based journalism
- Management, sales, distribution, circulation trends
- Donor assistance: Who are the major funders of NGO development? What is their annual level of commitment? How long have they been funding this sector, and how long do they plan to continue?
- Recommendations regarding the design of media strengthening/civil society activities and strategy for SO 2.3.

3. Political Processes

- Is providing assistance for political processes key to achieving USAID/Caucasus goals and objectives? Why, or why not?
- Does Georgia have a viable multiparty democracy? If not, what is needed to achieve this goal?
- Leading parties' viability and prospects for continued existence
- Structure and regional chapters
- Youth and women's involvement
- Elections: How can USAID assistance (and scarce resources) be most effectively used on the six months prior to elections? What are priorities for electoral assistance?
- Crafting of recommendations regarding the design of political processes/civil society activities and strategy for SO 2.3.

Personnel and Level of Effort

The Assessment Team will be working during April 2 – 13. Each member is responsible crafting the final assessment report for his/her section of the assessment.

The team members are requested to bring lap-top computers with them.

A six-day workweek is authorized for all experts.

Logistical support will be provided by the Mission. The team members should budget for interpreters. The budget should include any anticipated travel costs for interpreters. Two of the three experts should budget for four to five days of car rental in Georgia.

Deliverables

The team will be responsible to deliver draft reports to the Mission by April 13th, 2001:

a) The final Civil Society Assessment Report. The consultant will work closely with the Team and incorporate individual chapters on NGO development, media strengthening and political processes.
b) The team will conduct briefings at USAID/Caucasus at the end of each task.

Documents for Review

The 1998, 1999, 2000 NGO Sustainability Index (Georgia Section), USAID
Georgia's NGOs in the Process of Forming Civil Society, the ISAR/Horizonti Foundation
Impact Assessment, Internews Network Georgia
NDI Focus Group Report, March, 2001
NDI Political Parties Assessment, December, 2000
Freedom House Reports
DOS Human Rights Reports
USAID/Caucasus Strategy, FY 2000 – FY 2003

R4 FY 1999, FY 2000, USAID/Caucasus
Draft PMPs and PTPs
USAID/Caucasus Print Media Assessment (1998)

Annex 2

USAID/Caucasus/Georgia Civil Society Assessment
Including NGO Development, Independent Media and Political Processes
&
Performance Measuring Assistance (PMPs and PMTs)
for SOs 2.2 and 2.3

ARD Statement of Work

Summary

The purpose of this Scope of Work is twofold: a) preparation of a final Civil Society Assessment Report, including recommendations for possible re-tooling of SO 2.3 (in close cooperation with the members of a Civil Society Assessment Team); and b) development of final Performance Monitoring/Measuring Indicators for Strategic Objectives 2.2 and 2.3.

The Georgian Civil Society Assessment will examine three sub-sectors of democracy building: NGO development, independent media, and political processes. In addition, the assessment will evaluate current USAID assistance, donor support, and the local environment for providing this assistance. The assessment will also focus on civil society needs in Georgia and develop specific recommendations regarding the context and level of funding for future USAID assistance programs. This assessment will be conducted by USAID/W staff from April 2-13.

After the completion of the assessment and based on the major findings and recommendations, the contractor shall work with the Assessment Team and USAID/Caucasus Democracy and Governance team to (1) complete the final report for the Mission, including any recommendations for re-tooling the SO 2.3 strategy, and (2) finalize performance measurement indicators for both SOs 2.2 and 2.3.

Background

USAID/Caucasus Strategic Objective 2.3, "More Efficient and Responsive Local Governance," focuses on devolution of power to the regions of Georgia. This objective supports regional self-government initiatives, combined with promoting vibrant civil society, a free and independent mass media, and continued assistance for political processes. However, the major focus, as reflected in the results' framework, is the development of local governance and partnerships at the regional level. Civil society activities, including NGOs, mass Media and political processes, as well as any national-level undertakings are not well reflected in the IRS. In addition, the strategy envisioned a phase-out of funding for NGO and Media strengthening activities.

This Civil Society Assessment is crucial for future strategic programming in the USAID/Caucasus Democracy and Governance sector in Georgia. Moreover, the Assessment has been mandated by the EE Bureau. Finally, it may lead to retooling the strategic objective. The development of meaningful performance measuring indicators for SO 2.3 is closely connected with the results and recommendations of the CS Assessment.

USAID's Assistance

USAID/Caucasus/Georgia has provided an extensive assistance to the development of vibrant civil society over the years. USAID assistance included trainings, information dissemination, grants, study tours, etc. The main implementing partners in the effort have been ISAR/Horizonti, Internews, ICFJ, NDI, IRI, IFES, Eurasia Foundation.

Objectives and Tasks

1.1. Collaborate with the Civil Society Assessment Team and DG partners in finalizing recommendations of the Assessment Team and presenting them to USAID/Caucasus;
1.2. Based on assessment findings, compile a final report with recommendations for USAID/Caucasus. These recommendations may include suggestions for possible re-tooling of SO 2.3;
1.3. Craft recommendations regarding the design of CS activities and strategy for SO 2.3.

2.1. Refine and propose indicators associated with SOs 2.2 and 2.3 Intermediate Results.
2.2. Propose new indicators and data sources, if warranted, with emphasis in low-cost, easy access, efficiency and impact of specific programs.
2.3. Ensure gender integration throughout the strategy and PMP.
2.4. Finalize Mission PMP.

Personnel and Level of Effort

The contractor shall be required to provide one short-term technical consultant for this task.

Senior-level program development/implementation/monitoring/reporting specialist: 25 person days. Prior to arrival in Tbilisi, the consultant shall first meet with the Civil Society Assessment Team and pertinent implementing partners, as warranted, in Washington, DC. In Tbilisi, the consultant shall complete the final Civil Society Assessment Report. During the same period, the consultant shall work on PMPs for SOs 2.2 and 2.3.

Deliverables

The contractor will be responsible to deliver two major documents to the Mission by the dates listed below:

c) Civil Society Assessment first draft May 25, 2001.
d) The final Civil Society Assessment. The consultant shall work closely with the CS Assessment Team and incorporate individual chapters on NGO development, media strengthening and political processes by June 1, 2001.
e) First draft of Performance Monitoring Plans and Performance Monitoring Tables for SOs 2.2 and 2.3 submitted to Democracy and Governance Team by June 1, 2001.
f) Second draft of Performance Monitoring Plans and Performance Monitoring Tables for SOs 2.2 and 2.3 submitted to Democracy and Governance Team by June 7, 2001.
g) Final Performance Monitoring Plans and Performance Monitoring Tables for SOs 2.2 and 2.3 submitted to Democracy and Governance Team by June 15, 2001.
h) The Consultant will conduct briefings at USAID/Caucasus at the end of each task.

Performance Period/Workweek

A six-day workweek is authorized.

The Mission will provide airport pick up, office space and transportation within Tbilisi.

Documents for Review

The 2000 NGO Sustainability Index, for CEE and Eurasia , USAID
Georgia's NGOs in the Process of Forming Civil Society, the Horizonti Foundation
Impact Assessment, Internews Network Georgia
USAID/Caucasus Strategy, FY 2000 – FY 2003
R4 FY 1999, FY 2000, USAID/Caucasus
Draft PMPs and PTPs

Annex 3

Persons Consulted

USAID:

Michael Farbman	Mission Director
P.E. Balakrishnan	Deputy Mission Director
Gerald Andersen	Economic Restructuring Office Director, ER
Earl Gast	Program Officer, PPS
Nicole Jordania	Humanitarian Response Specialist, HR
Cate Johnson	Democracy and Governance (DG) Office Director
Gene Gibson	ROL Advisor, Deputy Director, DG
Joe Taggart	Local Government Advisor, DG
Vladimir Gorgadze	Local Government Specialist, DG
Gegeshidze Manana	Civil Society Specialist, DG
Ketty Makharashvili	ROL Specialist, DG
Nino Buachidze	Program Management Assistant, DG

Urban Institute:

Martha Sickles	Chief of Party
Alexanrde Kukhianidze	Deputy Chief of Party

IFES:

Michael Svetlic	Program Officer, Caucasus (Washington)
Silvana Puizine	Project Manager (Georgia)
Maya Gogoladze	

NDI:

Nelson C. Ledsky	Senior Associate Program Manager, Eurasia (Washington)
Katie Fox	Senior Program Officer (Washington)
Marta B. Mikkelsen	Program Officer, Eurasia (Washington)
Mark Mullen	Project Director (Tbilisi)
Keti Khutsishvili	Parliamentary Program Officer
Khatuna Khvichia	Local Government Program Officer

Eurasia Foundation:

Abby Williamson	Associate Country Director, Georgia
Alexander (Kakha) Lomaia	Country Director, Georgia
Vakhtang Kobaladze	Program Officer

Horizonti:

Nino Saakashvili	Director
Nikolos Oakley	Deputy Director

US Embassy:

Sandra Clark	Pol/Econ Section Chief
Steven Fagin	Political Officer
Sharon Hudson-Dean	Public Affairs Officer

British Embassy:

Lali Meskhi	OFED, Head of development Section

EC Delegation in Georgia:

Gunter Beuchel	Project Manager

Danish Refugee Council:
Marianne Knudsen Project Manager
Natia Deisadze Program Coordinator

The World Bank Resident Mission Georgia:
Inga Paichdze External Affairs

Open Society Georgia Foundation:
Michael Cachkhunashvili Executive Director

ICFJ
Bob Ortega
Marina Vashakmadze

Internews
Sibel Berzeg
Mark Behrendt
Genadi Uchumbegashvili
Zura Khrikadze

Editors-in chief's roundtable:
Merab Moistrapishvili – At 6 o'clock
Giorgi Tevdorashvili - Kviris Palitra
Manana Kartozia - Dilis Gazeti

Journalists' roundtable:
Tbilisi, Internews Office
Genadi Uchumbegashvili – Internews
David kikalishvili – Rustavi 2
Malkhaz Vardosanidze – UTN
Badri Nanetashvili – Trialeti
Alexandre Sulava – Free lancer
Nino Japiashvili - Internews
Levan Gakheladze – Green Wave

Tbilisi, Print Journalists
Sozar Subeliani – Independent Journalists Association
Revaz Sakevarishvili – Alia
Giorgi Kalandadze – Resonance
Keti Bokhua – Iprinda
Inga Alavidze – Droni
Marina Vashakmadze - ICFJ

Kutaisi
Nino Gachava –Iverioni
Tinatin Dvalishvili – Imeretis Moambe
Khatuna Gogiberidze – P.S.
Nino Deisadze – Kutaisi
Vakhtang Kikalishvili – Radio Old Kutaisi

TV Stations:
Tbilisi
Erosi Kitsmarishvili - Rustavi-2

Zestaponi
Leri Bitsadze - Argo

Akhaltsikhe
Tamaz Petriashvili - Lomsia

Borjomi
Tristan Tsutskiridze - Borjomi TV

ISFED
Nugzar Ivanidze
Nugzar Kupreishvili

IRI
Dima Shashkin

NDP
Irina Sarishvili

TACIS
Steven Tupper

ICCC
Kote Kandelaki

Young Scientists' Association
Levan Mjavanadze
Gocha Shanidze

Newspaper Resonance
Malkhaz Ramishvili

French Embassy
Pascal Juste

International Center for Journalists

Robert Ortega	Program Director, ProMedia II

Inter-Fraction team, consisting of opposition parties – Kutaisi

Badri Alpaidze	Socialists (Chairman)	Member of Social Issues Committee
Roland Giorgadze	Labourists	Legislative Committee Head
Gela Gubeladze	Traditionalists	Human Rights Committee
Aleko Akhaladze	Revival	Revision Committee (former)
Zurab Datuashvili	Traditionalists	Education Committee
Kakha Chachuashvili	Traditionalists	Former head of Sakrebulo
Mamuka Chanishvili	Traditionalists	Ex-head of Financial and Budgeting Committee

Parliament:

Maia Nadiradze	Parliamentary Group "Traditionalist"	M.P. of Georgia
David Gamkrelidze	New Faction (Chairman)	M.P. of Georgia

Ozurgeti:

George Kharadze	CUG (Regional Chairman)	Head of Sakrebulo
Boris Shetsiruli	CUG	Sakrebulo Secretary
Akaki Kikvadze	CUG	Head of Financial-Budgeting Committee, Sakrebulo
Irina Khachapuridze	NDP	Deputy Head of Social and Health Issues Committee

State Chancellery:

Teimuraz Kortua	State Adviser, Economic Reforms Adviser
Prof. Zaza Piralishvili	Head of Civic and Political Relations Office

Georgian Stock Exchange:

George Loladze	Chairman of Supervisory Board

ICIC – Initiative for a Competitive Inner City:

Alen G. Amirkhanian	Vice President (Boston)

The Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development:

Ghia Nodia	Chairman, Board

Meeting at Liberty Institute:

David Sikharulidze	Atlantic Council of Georgia	Executive Director
Levan Ramishvili	Liberty Institute	Director
Constantine Vardzelashvili	Tbilisi Press Club	
Nana Kakabadze	Former Political Prisoners for Human Rights	

The Union of Democrate Meskhs:

Amiran Meskheli	Chairman

International Organization of Human Rights Protection and Social Securing

Omar Kereselidze	Member of Coordination Council

Annex 4

Sample Media Success Stories

Financial sustainability increased. As a direct result of Internews training in sales and advertising, Borjomi TV's monthly revenues increased from 70 Lari to 900 Lari and the station is making a profit for the first time. The station said that without Internews support it either would not exist today or at least would not have the kind of news and programs that contribute to society.

New Freedom of Information Law utilized. Local media reported successfully using the freedom of information provision of the new Administrative Code. ICFJ has printed a model letter citing the legislation that media can use to obtain public information.

Local news programs hold government accountable. For example, after Borjomi TV ran a story about how a local village had been adversely affected because local authorities had not acted to replace a washed-out bridge that was the main access route to the village, local government officials identified the person responsible for this matter and the bridge was rebuilt.

Rule of law enforced through media oversight. When the director of a battery factory in Zestaponi told the Argoni TV station about a scam by a minority shareholder in which $29,000 was illegally taken from the factory's bank account, Argoni investigated and featured the story on an investigative news program. As a result, criminal charges have been brought against the perpetrators. Similarly, when the new owner of a refrigerator factory in Zestaponi lost a court case upholding a decision by a gamgebeli to de-privatize the factory, a new court case was initiated after Argoni TV covered the story in its investigative journalism program.

Local news programs have a positive effect on the lives of the local population. For example, after running a story about poor working conditions at the Borjomi water factory, the company began to address worker grievance and make improvements in working conditions.

Citizens trust and value independent media. Local independent TV stations regularly receive letters from citizens describing problems and asking the station to help. Borjomi TV's non-scientific social research data shows that 80 percent to90 percent of the citizens of Borjomi regularly watch its local evening news program. When the popular commentator of the 60 Minutes news program got in trouble with the government, public outcry forced the government to back down. (add specifics).

Citizens have access to more information. Independent media provide citizens with valuable information, such as information about local government budgets.

Local NGOs benefit from independent media. Independent media cooperate with local NGOs, cover their activities, and invite NGO leaders to participate in talk shows.

Use of public resources monitored. Newspaper P.S. in Kutaisi ran a series of investigative journalism stories about the improper use of a grant from the German government to a local orphanage. The newspaper used Georgia's new freedom of information legislation to obtain official documents from the mayor's office that proved that the person appointed by the mayor's office to oversee the grant had used the grant for personal gain. Instead of using the grant money to send poor orphans abroad, the director received money from wealthy families to send their children abroad. As a result of the series, the German grantor began an investigation and a court case was initiated in Kutaisi.

Government officials are wary of the power of independent media. Argoni TV local news broadcast footage of the arrest of a young person accused of stealing. When it turned out that the youth was caught up in a complex scam and might not be guilty, the police approached Argoni to ask if they would be portrayed negatively if they released the youth.

Media advocacy groups successfully defend media rights. The Free Journalists Club (check name) successfully sued a government ministry that refused to provide public information to a journalist as required under the Freedom of Information provision of the new Administrative Code.

USAID Media Assistance credited. Attribution of results is always difficult, but some media outlets directly credit USAID assistance for their survival and/or success.

Official corrupt practices scrutinized. Villagers wrote letter about a local governor? who gave land to friends tax-free. Court case?

Rule of Law upheld. Teachers of a local school sued Gemgeoba for not paying them their salaries on time. Gamgeoba won in court claiming that payment of salaries is the responsibility of the local council. Argoni TV investigated and found and presented information that indicated that salaries are in fact the responsibility of the gamgeoba. This information was used when another group of school teachers sued the gamgeoba shortly thereafter, this time successfully.

Media support the electoral process. In 1998 a candidate for parliament in the Borjomi region beat the establishment favorite after performing well on televised debate programs sponsored by the station. Two months after another candidate who won local office in 1998(?) promised in a TV interview to solve the town's water service problems in two weeks, the station did a news story about the continuing water service problems and re-broadcast the candidate's televised promise.

Local government using access to the media. The Borjomi TV station will include interviews with local government officials who feel compelled to explain their inability to solve certain problems in their district due to lack of authority or resources from the central government.

Annex 5

Additional Political Process/Party Assistance Issues for Consideration

- ***Whether to support party poll-watching***

In many cases, the most thorough election observers are party poll-watchers; other observers are not contesting the elections and do not have the same personal stake in the electoral outcome. Yet, in the case of Georgia, several interviewees highlighted that in many cases, party poll-watchers do not actively seek to prevent fraud – they may be nominally a member of an opposition party, but on Election Day, support CUG or in Ajara, Revival. Obviously, this is not the case for all party poll-watchers. Another challenge, however, does present itself. While several of the "primary" opposition parties have a cadre of well-trained poll-watchers, the parties lack the resources to train legions of party supporters and to deploy them extensively. Since the principal impediment to poll-watching is resources, the Mission would have to decide whether it wanted to support the deployment of poll-watchers from all the major parties, in accordance with forthcoming ADS policy.

- ***Whether to support a GOTV program for the parliamentary elections***

Towards the end of the strategy period, Georgia is scheduled to hold parliamentary elections. Participation in the presidential elections was believed to be much lower than officially reported. If participation in the local elections is also limited, many Georgians and international actors will be interested in supporting a get-out-the-vote campaign. However, it should be noted that citizens' decision to opt not to participate could be considered a reasonable action if the electoral process remains flawed. As a result, a GOTV effort would be unlikely to succeed. If, however, electoral reforms are initiated that will likely change how elections are run, a campaign highlighting the new procedures that ensure one's vote is counted as it was cast could be important to slowly rebuild participation in the electoral process.

- ***Whether support for international election observation is required***

The Team definitively recommends support for domestic observation of the electoral process, but the need for international observation is less clear. In some cases, international missions can amplify the voice of domestic observers. The U.S. NGO can "share the limelight" that they have with the national and international media because of their observation mission with domestic observers. The U.S. NGO can refer reporters and key political leaders to the findings of the domestic observers to reinforce their own statements and to increase the visibility of the domestic organization. Several members of political parties felt that domestic observers, while competent, did not and could not command the attention of key decision-makers.

Many interviewees spoke in detail about how frequently deaf the government was to public commentary. For instance, many Georgian groups spoke out about recent acts of religious intolerance in Georgia, but the President only commented the day after the U.S. and British embassies released statements expressing concern on this subject. On the other hand, the expense of launching an international organization mission with broad coverage of the nation's polling stations is several hundred thousand dollars at a minimum. Also, NDI and IRI have ongoing programs that require them to work with many of the same actors who might well be critiqued by an international observation mission. The Team feels that, most likely, USAID need not support international observation given the costs associated with such missions, the interest of NDI and IRI in preserving effective working relationships for their existing activities, and the probability that other international observation missions would be organized. This would particularly be the case if the partner preferred not to issue an independent statement, but rather to fold their statement into that of a multilateral delegation. Often the greatest role of U.S. NGO missions is their willingness to issue critiques that multilateral

delegations do not. A final determination should only be made following thorough discussion with the embassy and perhaps the partners themselves.

- ***When to engage with the CEC***

If the control of election administration is largely unchanged, partnership with the CEC on technical matters is likely to yield little in the way of substantive results. However, determining under what conditions to engage the CEC is a less clear case. If revisions to the electoral code are adopted, the Mission should review in detail with the embassy, its cooperating partners, and domestic actors whether those changes address four issues: 1) the extent of independence of the election commission; 2) the specificity of who is required to do what to ensure sound elections; 3) what recourse is available to concerned parties if actors are not appropriately fulfilling their responsibilities; and 4) what administrative, civil, and criminal penalties exist to sanction those who break laws or regulations. The Mission should partner with the CEC only if changes are such that the following are adequately addressed at least in part: enhanced CEC independence, decreased ambiguity of responsibly (which currently enables administrators to ensue taking action), and improved ability of stakeholders to seek stronger sanctions against parties perpetrating fraud or not fulfilling their responsibilities to prevent fraud.